

Daily Telegraph (online)

Former Tory peer favourite for Ukip leadership

Lord Pearson of Rannoch, a leading peer who left the Conservative party over Europe, is to stand for the leadership of the UK Independence Party (Ukip), the Daily Telegraph can reveal.

By [Andrew Porter](#), Political Editor Published: 4:40PM BST 15 Sep 2009

Lord Pearson last night said that he has been spurred on by the refusal of the main parties to come clean over the Lisbon Treaty.

He will become the favourite to take over from Nigel Farage, who is standing down to try and become Ukip's first MP. The Telegraph revealed two weeks ago that he would challenge John Bercow, the Commons Speaker, in Buckingham.

Lord Pearson defected from the Tories to Ukip in 2007 in protest at the party's insufficiently Eurosceptic stand. He said the Conservatives under David Cameron were "going in the wrong direction."

His move gave Ukip its first parliamentary representation.

Last night he told the Telegraph: "It is rather daunting so close to a General Election, but I am throwing my hat into the ring."

He cited a poll in yesterday's Daily Telegraph as an example of how the political leaders are not in tune with public opinion on Europe. Forty three per cent said they would prefer to leave the EU altogether rather than accept the Lisbon Treaty.

He added: "I think Lisbon is a watershed. If it goes through that's pretty much the end of the game. Our membership of the EU has removed the rights of British democracy. "There is now a secretive process of law-making that entirely excludes the Commons and Lords and at the huge cost of £16.5 billion. We cannot afford it economically or democratically."

Laws to regulate the City are an example of where the EU will now wield extra power, he said. And that threatened the City which is a "lifeblood which churns around the economy," Lord Pearson, 67, added.

The peer said the Tory position on Europe was not good enough.

He said: "Cameron has promised a referendum if it (Lisbon) is not ratified, but he needs to offer one either way. And if it has been ratified then that referendum can only be about whether we should be in or out."

Mr Farage said he would "refine" some Ukip policies if he took over. The party must promise local referendums on a range of issues to make sure people do have a say in how their lives are run.

If elected leader Lord Pearson will face a tough task to carry on Ukip's recent success. Mr Farage's surprise departure comes after three years during which Ukip has continued to out-perform, including in June's European elections when a record 13 MEPs were elected.

But Mr Farage wants to secure a first Commons seat and has seized on the Mr Bercow's vulnerability in Buckingham. The Speaker has been under pressure over his own expense claims which were disclosed by the Telegraph.

Mr Farage also believes that Mr Bercow's conversion from a right winger to a more liberal politician in recent years means voters in Buckingham will not get the chance to vote for a proper conservative politician at the election next spring.

It is understood that Mr Farage would welcome Lord Pearson's elevation.

A Ukip insider said: "He is the best man for the job and someone who can unite the party."